

## Message Text

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FM AMCONSUL HONG KONG

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6463

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

C O N F I D E N T I A L HONG KONG 3124

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SOCI CH

SUBJ: RUMORS OF A CHRISTIAN REVIVAL IN THE PRC

SUMMARY: HK' S CATHOLIC AND ANGLICAN BISHOPS HAVE TOLD CONGENOFFS  
THAT THERE IS LITTLE CONCRETE EVIDENCE TO SUGGEST THAT RECENT  
REPORTS OF RENEWED CHRISTIAN ACTIVITY IN CHINA ARE TRUE.  
END SUMMARY

1. RECENT UNCONFIRMED REPORTS WHICH ARE BEGINNING TO ATTRACT  
PRESS ATTENTION SUGGEST THAT THE PRC MAY BE RELAXING CONTROLS ON  
CHRISTIANITY IN CHINA. MACAU' S ANGLICAN VICAR LIN JU- CHENG TOLD  
CONGENOFFS ( AMONG OTHERS) HE HAD HEARD THAT A THEOLOGICAL  
SEMINARY  
HAD RECENTLY REOPENED IN NANKING. ACCORDING TO LIN, THE SEMINARY  
WAS INTERDENOMINATIONAL, BUT HEADED BY THE ANGLICAN BISHOP OF  
CHINA. THE SCHOOL HAD ABOUT FIFTY STUDENTS, THE MAJORITY OF  
WHOM WERE OLDER PRIESTS OR DEVOUT LAYMENT CHOSEN BY VARIOUS  
CHURCHES. THE HK STANDARD, MARCH 30, REPORTED THAT RECENT  
TRAVELERS TO CANTON HAD SEEN BIBLES PRINTED IN SIPLIFIED CHAR-  
ACTERS IN PRIVATE HOMES AND ON SALE IN MARKETPLACES. THE  
REPORT CLAIMED THAT A FEW CHURCHES HAD REOPENED AND WERE  
OPERATING  
SEMI- CLANDESTINELY, BUT WITHOUT BEING SUPPRESSED BY THE REGIME.
2. IN PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS, BOTH THE ANGLICAN AND CATHOLIC  
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BISHOPS OF HK HAVE TOLD CONGENOFFS THAT THERE IS LITTLE CORROBORATING EVIDENCE TO SUGGEST THAT THESE REPORTS ARE IN FACT TRUE. BEYOND A GENERALLY MORE RELAXED ATMOSPHERE WITHIN CHINA, THESE CHURCH LEADERS SEE LITTLE REASON TO BELIEVE THAT A REVIVAL OF CHRISTIANITY IS NOW POSSIBLE IN THE PRC. BOTH BISHOPS FEEL THAT AFTER 24 YEARS OF COMMUNIST RULE, ORGANIZED RELIGION HAS BEEN TOTALLY SUPPRESSED. IN ADDITION, CHRISTIANITY HAS BEEN DISCREDITED TO SUCH AN EXTENT THAT NO YOUNG PEOPLE, AND FEW, IF ANY, OLDER CHINESE WOULD BE WILLING TO BECOME INVOLVED IN RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS. NEITHER BISHOP HAD ANY INDEPENDENT INFORMATION OF THE NANKING SEMINARY REOPENING, NOR HAD HEARD OF ANY CONCRETE EVIDENCE OF A RENEWAL OF RELIGIOUS ACTIVITY IN CHINA.

3. ACCORDING TO A BRITISH EMBASSY REPORT, IN 1971 A DELEGATION LED BY FORMER ITALIAN FOREIGN TRADE MINISTER COLOMBO DEMANDED AND WAS ALLOWED TO ATTEND MASS IN PEKING. SINCE THEN THE PRC HAS ALLOWED ONE CATHOLIC CHURCH TO HOLD REGULAR SERVICES IN THE CAPITAL. GIBIGO MELLIS, SINOLOGIST IN THE ITALIAN EMBASSY AT PEKING AND A FORMER PRIEST, HAS PRIVATELY DISPARAGED THESE SERVICES IN CONVERSATIONS WITH CONGEN OFFICERS. ACCORDING TO MELLIS, THEY ARE ALWAYS ATTENDED BY THE SAME FEW CHINESE AND ARE HELD PRINCIPALLY FOR FOREIGNERS. ACCORDING TO HK'S CATHOLIC BISHOP, HOWEVER, THE MASS CELEBRATED IN PEKING IS RECOGNIZED AS VALID THOUGH IT IS SAID IN LATIN AND THUS SOMEWHAT OUTDATED.

4. OTHER THAN THE CHURCH IN PEKING, WE CURRENTLY KNOW OF ONLY A FEW OTHER VESTIGES OF ORGANIZED CHRISTIANITY THAT HAVE BEEN OBSERVED. THE CHINESE CATHOLIC CHURCH, WHICH ACTUALLY CONSECRATED BISHOPS IN THE FIFTIES, AND A PATRIOTIC CATHOLIC S' ASSOCIATION EXIST AT LEAST IN NAME AND ARE HEADED BY THE ARCHBISHOP OF SHENYANG. DURING A RECENT VISIT TO CHINA, SCHOLAR DOAK BARNETT TALKED WITH AN ANGLICAN BISHOP WHO RETAINED HIS TITLE, BUT NOW WORKED AS A SCHOOL TEACHER.

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